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TEACHING THE FOREIGN-BORN

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The foreign-born who enter our night schools may be grouped into three classes: first, the educated foreigner who applies himself diligently to his English, and who, if his teacher, like the brook, goes on forever, grasps all he hears; second, the alien who attended school in the mother-country, and who reads and speaks very little English; third, the illiterate, who probably speaks no English.

The ability to read and to speak English cannot make the foreigner a good American, nor does the preparation for the citizenship examination always cause him to be a sound American. The night schools ought to ease his way by teaching the new citizen to think and to feel that "all men are created equal"; that they are "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights"; that among these are "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This year I have made "pursuit of happiness" the path through which the students learn to speak, to read, to write, and to be citizens.

The educated foreigner understands the privilege of becoming a citizen, but he requires the regular drills in English; his readings, discussions, arguments, and debates through class organization will give him the impetus to the proper American spirit. But with the second and third classes the road to learning English is strait and long, and to some it is very steep and rugged; therefore the school must put forth efforts to keep up interest and enthusiasm, or many of the illiterates will drop out of the class. How interest keeps up is not so important as keeping it up. Success depends largely upon the enthusiasm of the teacher. With this enthusiasm must go sympathy, resourcefulness, high ideals of American citizenship, and a desire for human service.

On the opening night of school last winter, after a drill in the recognition and the pronunciation of certain nouns and verb forms,

the making of sentences, and an easy reading lesson (for pronunciation and thought), I gave my students of the second class a dozen books (especially prepared for foreigners) from which to choose one for the regular lessons in reading. They cast aside books of travel, biographies, geographies, civics, and government. One man took up a history, but he said, "Pretty good, but too much war now." "Book no good for now," said Michael; "want something about now." Truly the men expressed just my feeling. "I want a book about Wilson," said one. "About Pershing and Foch!" exclaimed others. I had no material with me, but picking up the evening paper I called on various members of the class to read at least the headlines of the articles of interest, and we discussed those which they understood. Now, that was not the first time that I had used a newspaper in the schoolroom, but in other years only a few men were interested in the paper; the others always went on studying the reader, thinking perhaps that the page-to-page procedure was the quickest route to English. That night the men proved that a new and more vital content should be given to them.

The next day I prepared an easy reading lesson about Woodrow Wilson. I had enough typewritten copies made to supply the class. As the lesson satisfied the demands, I prepared many such lessons. Often I have the students compose their own reading material. For instance, "The President's Reception in Italy" is a topic we chose. Each man contributed a sentence on the subject. The sentences were written on the board by the pupils; then the thoughts were arranged in logical order, and either the teacher or the students wrote the finished product. Often the men desire to copy the lesson on paper for home study.

During the United War Workers' drive a singing lesson was proposed by one of the teachers. Once a week we assembled in the auditorium for a music period. At one time the victrola was the chief attraction, but not now, for our first singing lesson caused such happy faces and aroused such feelings of duty to adjust themselves to community life that singing became an active force for improvement and for the realization of the significance of community life. Five years ago I should not have dared to let the men sing, "Take your money from your old wool sock, and pay, pay,

pay," but the efforts our non-English-speaking pupils made to keep up with the others in all the songs made the lesson worth while. Why shouldn't we teach them English through "There's a Long, Long Trail," "Keep the Home Fires Burning," "Over There," "Smiles," or the popular favorites which succeed them? My reward came that night when Luigi, who neither speaks nor reads English, showed me his song book and said, "Smile," and Luigi smiled.

Before school the next evening every member of my class was writing on a board. Some were humming the tune of one piece and some that of another. One group were writing "wool sock," "wool coat." Then came questions. "Teacher, how do I write 'sweater'?" Some wrote "wool sweater." "How do I write 'cotton'?" And spontaneously the men wrote a list of cotton articles. From another section of the room came a question, "Is this right for 'over there'?" "How do we write 'over here'?" Have you ever tried to teach *there* and *here* to pupils? The rhythm of the song solved my difficulties. We learned more words from that one singing lesson than I hoped to teach in a month.

Next we read "America" in the class. Slowly and patiently we proceeded with the words. The following day one of my day-school girls said, "A little old man from your night school came to our store to buy 'America.' We sell only newspapers and magazines. He was so disappointed because we hadn't the words of the song that mother thought I ought to tell you." Of course I gave him the song. Well, that man (a Hungarian) of fifty-two learned the words and the tune, and he is never happier than when he sings it (by himself) for visitors.

One of my younger students decided to learn the "Star-Spangled Banner" before the others did. He studied while at work at his bench in the pottery.

"What are you reading, Dago?" said his foreman one day.

"I'm learning the song what everybody stands up for," replied Tony; "I'm going to be a citizen."

"You're too black to be a citizen" was the answer.

"Do you know the 'Star-Spangled Banner'?" questioned Tony. Here men came to Tony's assistance. The foreman failed in his recitation.

"I'll be a better citizen than you," said Tony; "when I stand up, I'll know what I stand up for."

Through the singing lesson we received the momentum for something beyond the daily toil.

One night Umile, a quiet fellow of thirty-one, met me at the gate at least three-quarters of an hour before school time. He greeted me with "Hello, teacher, I got a letter from me wife and leetle boy and they say will they come to America, or will I come back." "Come in, Umile," said I, "and we will talk about your letters." The man has been in America seven years, and he cannot be a citizen unless his wife is in America. These letters are the first he has received for a year. Umile seldom spoke in English, but he had something to say that night and the floodgates of his English opened as he talked about his "leetle boy only eight years old and he write me a letter and he want to come to America." Then all the light died out of his eyes and the lines around his mouth became deeper as he said, "Maybe they won't let them come here." Then his face grew radiant as he said, "You get them to come." Here is where the teacher must think. Before me stood Umile waiting for advice. The man stood between love and duty—love for the wife and the boy, and duty to the America he has grown to respect. If his wife and son are not permitted to come to this country, shall I tell him to go back to them and to Italy?

Since many letters had come that day from Europe and the camps, I proposed that each write a letter that evening. Certainly they wrote in their mother-tongue. I gained my point in teaching the arrangement of the letter and the way to address the envelope. I wrote a note to Umile's son, and at Michael's request I wrote one to his wife. Michael has been in America ten years, but because his wife will not come here he has been refused his citizenship papers. To each I gave a small paper American flag. Each pasted the flag at the top of his letter, except Bruno. He is a husky fellow who has steadily refused to sign a "declaration of intention." When I questioned him he said that he did not like America because there were no hills, no grass, and no birds as in Italy. Here arose another situation that the teacher must direct. True, in Bruno's world there were no beautiful things. His

boarding-house stood under the shadow of the great mill in which he toiled days one week and nights the next; even the school which he attended was hooded by the heavy black smoke that poured from the giant stacks. Have you ever longed for green grass and flowers and birds? Well, I have. But we can adjust ourselves to conditions, and Bruno has not been trained to do that. Friends have given Bruno employment on a farm. This is his last letter to me: "Miss Teacher, the farm look like italy only it nicer cause i get all to et i can take and they let me play the peano. I gues i be a citizen. You get my paper soon."

When the legislature opens there will be several visits made to the state capitol. A trip through the capitol, a visit to the museum, and a stay in the House of Assembly and the Senate that will enable the men to get an idea of the working order of passing bills will give us material to read and to talk about for weeks. Again, the departments of our federal government are more easily understood after the real work of the state is seen. Arrangements with the public library for our visit there are always made in advance. Then one or two librarians are assigned to explain to the men where to get certain books and how to get books of reference. Practice is then given to each man who desires to take a book home. A visit to the post-office simplifies matters in the money-order department. I always train the men to make out money orders. Time spent in explaining the stamp department and the parcel-post service is worth while. I have taken classes to a bank, but if that is not possible the classroom may be turned into a play bank by having windows drawn on the blackboards marked "Paying Teller" and "Receiving Teller," and others marked "Liberty Loan" and "School Banks." An explanation of a bank-book, the actual writing of a check and a deposit slip, and a warning about forgery prepare the coming citizen for the future. Why he must pay taxes requires a little attention, and our tax receiver has given our men very interesting talks. The county clerk's office is open any night there is a class to take out papers, and it is customary for one or two teachers to accompany the prospective citizen to the office. A representative of the school goes with the students to the court for the final examination.

A noted teacher of Latin once told me that he never made an outline of the lesson he intended to teach, but he just filled himself with his subject and then gave the good to the class with "silent lightning." We know from past experiences that just teaching English and preaching Americanization will not wipe out illiteracy or bring about universal citizenship. If we are to aim for the clearly useful and the humanly significant, the night-school teacher must fill his mind with American needs and ideals, concentrate until the force from within lets him understand the things that come close home to the interests of the students, and then he is ready to plan a procedure that will involve genuine constructive activity.

I said in the beginning we ought to teach our men to think. By that I mean to think independently. Many of my students think they must say what their "bosses" tell them to say. Perhaps the result of a lesson I gave two years ago will illustrate. "Do you think women ought to vote?" said I to a class one evening. Everyone shouted, "No!" "Why? Give me reasons." "They don't know enough," shouted Guiseppi, who could read only a few sentences. "Did you ever go to school in Italy, Guiseppi?" I questioned. "No mum," he replied. I could see no point where I could convince the fellow that *some* women knew more than *some* men, for I did not wish my pupils to know what I thought. I asked many others to state their reasons, but most thought men were the rightful owners of the ballot. Tony stated that women ought to stay home and let the men earn the money. "Why don't you take out your first paper, Tony?" I asked. "Cost too much; I have to pay taxes." "How much do you get each week?" "About ten dollar." "Can your wife read?" "Yes." Tony could not. There were many good reasons given why women should not vote, but no favorable ones. At the close of the season we had a little party for the citizenship class. As I gave a greeting to each Vincent said, "Madam, I thank you for helping me be a citizen. I shall vote for women."

Last I shall let you see what I mean by teaching the men to feel. There was one young fellow in an advanced class who memorized Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. His enunciation, pronunciation, and the force he used were so excellent that I had him

recite in public several times. He was among the first to enlist when the United States entered the war. When I read that Corporal Francesco ——— was severely wounded, I wrote to the boy complimenting him on his promotion and expressing my sympathy for his suffering. He replied, "Oh, a wound is nothing for the cause we're fighting for, and don't congratulate me. It's the night school that wants that. I needed everything I learned there. We were tired out after the first battle, but I said to the men remember what Columbus said, 'Sail on! sail on! and on!' And when shells were bursting about us the men often said, 'Teach us that address.' Then we recited, 'That we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that the nation shall, under God, have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.'"